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ABSTRACT

Professional organizations that serve school principals have found that the needs and interests of their members have changed, impacting the quality of their service. This study was launched to understand more fully the contextual variables that affected principals' work. It investigated demographic trends among secondary-school principals in Texas, issues that demanded their attention, and resources that helped their work. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through a survey of school principals and a series of focus groups held in the state. Demographic data show that an increasing number of middle and high school principals are new to their role and require relevant products and services of professional organizations. More recently appointed principals are more likely to be female, minority, and from an urban setting than more experienced principals. These younger principals are constituencies traditionally underserved by professional principal groups. They also reject old-style professional organizations built around hierarchical governance and longevity and embrace more collaborative and participative activities. This study offers guidance to both professional organizations and institutions of higher education about issues and trends important to middle and high school principals. It identifies strategies that principals find useful in ensuring their continued professional growth. (Contains 14 references and 16 tables.) (RT)

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Riding the Rapids: Professional Organizations in a Time of Demographic and Technological Change

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The contemporary principalship is characterized by competing and often-conflicting demands---heightened accountability, strengthened teaching and learning, greater collaboration with school and community groups, improved test scores (Speck, 1995). As the demands on school principals changed, professional organizations found that the needs and interests of their members also changed.

In order to more fully understand the contextual variables that impacted principal's work, a study was launched to examine trends and issues confronting middle and high school principals in Texas. Sponsored by the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP), the study investigated demographic trends among secondary school principals in Texas, issues that demanded their attention, and resources that helped with their work. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through a survey of school principals and from a series of focus group sessions held in all regions of the state. Both members and non-members participated in the study.

The study revealed several trends, each of which, if unattended, has the potential to make professional organizations increasingly vulnerable:

- Demographic data showed that an increasing number of middle and high school principals in Texas were new to their role and did not have the same loyalty to professional organizations. More recently appointed principals were more likely to be female, minority and from an urban setting than more experienced principals---constituencies traditionally underserved by professional principal groups.
- The primary reason for membership was access to up-to-date information. At the same time nearly all Texas principals reported having a computer with Internet access in their office.
- Principals with fewer years of experience were more likely to see their role as one of instructional leader, leader of innovation and change, and responsible for high levels of student achievement.

Together these trends require that professional organizations examine and even modify their programs, products and services. Recently appointed principals are more likely to reject the old managerial role of the principalship and want different services from their association. They also reject old style professional organizations built around hierarchical governance and longevity and embrace more collaborative and participative activities. They value information that helps them in their role and through technology are able to access information and publications, their primary reason for membership, without incurring the costs of membership.

This study offers guidance to both professional organizations and institutions of higher education about issues and trends important to middle and high school principals. It identifies strategies that principals find useful in assuring their continued professional growth.

Context for the Study

Professional associations find themselves in an awkward position. After years of service to members, they face the challenge of providing programs, products and services that address the dual issues of changing membership demographics and changing demands on their members (Drucker, 1990; Norris, 1990).

Access to technology and the proliferation of many advocacy groups targeted at specific classes of members and specific issues also contributes to the vulnerability (Treacy & Wiersema, 1995). Potential members find themselves inundated with multiple sources of information, alternative access to programs and products, at a time that many professional organizations find themselves required to raise membership dues to maintain their services.

Associations serving school leaders are equally vulnerable. In order to clarify the issues it faced one national association conducted two separate studies of its members (Williamson & Johnston, 1996a, 1996b). The studies

identified areas of vulnerability in programs, products and services and identified strategies that the association might adopt to meet the identified challenges.

In collaboration with TASSP staff the researcher identified the following goals for this project. They reflected a desire to provide detailed information to the Association to enhance its current planning initiatives and guide development of its strategic plan. The goals included:

1. To gather information on the needs and interests of middle and high school principals.
2. To provide guidance for updating, refining and strengthening TASSP's programs, products and services.
3. To assess products and services offered to principals by TASSP to identify markets and opportunities that will expand service and increase revenue.
4. To provide guidance for assuring that TASSP continues to be seen as the premier professional organization for secondary school principals in Texas.
5. To develop a detailed demographic profile of association members.

Methodology

This study of the needs and interests of secondary school principals in Texas consisted of two major components:

a. A comprehensive assessment of *needs and interests* of secondary school principals in Texas.

b. An assessment of *programs, products and services* offered by TASSP for secondary school leaders in Texas.

This particular report will examine one aspect of the investigation---the relationship between the changing demographics of secondary school principals in Texas, their identified needs and interests, and their membership in TASSP.

Data for this study were collected in two ways. First, the researchers designed, in collaboration with Association staff, two survey instruments, one for members and one for non-members. The surveys elicited demographic data, reasons for membership in professional associations, the perceived value of TASSP services, and information about the major responsibilities of secondary school leaders.

These surveys were mailed to 3,264 TASSP members as well as 698 non-members. A total of 1,750 surveys were returned including 1,583 responses from members and 167 for non-members, for a return of 44.3 percent. An effort was made to assure that both members and non-members from each of the TASSP regions were included in the survey. Due to the variance in membership among the regions, and the willingness of school leaders to complete the survey, returns varied.

Completed surveys were returned to the offices of the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals and were then forwarded to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for data entry and analysis.

The second data source was a series of five focus group interviews conducted with a combination of members and non-members at locations throughout Texas and at the national conferences of the National Middle School Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Focus groups, by their nature, are comprised of volunteers who engage in structured conversation around a series of questions and topics.

Data from these interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify key words and other descriptors. The data varied little from that gathered from the survey but provided rich descriptive data that will enhance and enlighten the understanding of the changing relationship between Texas secondary school principals and their professional association.

A primary source of data were interviews conducted with the focus groups described earlier. An open-ended format was selected (Spradley, 1979) because it afforded the researcher an opportunity for greater interaction with the

participants and allowed the participants to participate spontaneously and with great energy.

Written notes of each interview were prepared. This created a document of each interview that could be later reviewed and analyzed for key words and ideas.

In such interviews the role of the participant often changes to that of "informant" (Yin, 1994).Yin suggested that informants not only provide their own insights into the investigation but also provide the researcher with suggestions for additional ways to gather the data.

The interviews served yet another function. They provided an opportunity for the researcher to corroborate certain facts that emerged from other documentation (e.g., member and non-member survey). The interviews allowed the researcher to probe the written responses and to elicit information from the respondents about the impact of the project.

An ongoing data analysis process was utilized for this study (Eisner, 1991; Yin 1994). Information was arranged in files for each group (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Sources of information were charted and coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Charles' (1995) four steps were utilized to identify topics, cluster topics into categories, form categories into patterns, and develop conclusions based on the patterns.

Open-ended responses and writings were analyzed to identify patterns of responses and reveal major themes. Interview data were then examined, using key word and trend analyses. The themes were confirmed and the interviews provided explicit details and examples to illustrate each of the themes.

The study examined the current state of the secondary school principalship in Texas. It focused primarily on gathering demographic data and identifying needs and interests of contemporary secondary school principals. By examining these issues other topics were not minimized. The emphasis, however, was on identification of those needs and interests that were of greatest importance to the principals.

This study, while focused on secondary school principals, identified issues emerging among principals at all levels. The themes, while specific to secondary school leaders, are relevant at any level. The insights gained from this study can inform and enlighten the work of both professional organizations serving principals, and higher education programs preparing principals.

Findings

This study investigated the current status of secondary school principals in Texas. It gathered demographic data about members and non-members of the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals and identified issues and trends that impact decisions about membership in professional organizations. The data revealed several important trends.

Demographic Changes

One major element of this study was the development of a demographic profile of secondary school principals in Texas. In order to more fully understand demographic trends the data were disaggregated based on gender, level (middle, high), setting (urban, suburban, and rural), ethnicity, and years of experience as a principal or assistant principal. The data revealed a pattern of changing demographics, one similar to a recent national study (Educational Research Service, 1998).

Detailed data about the demographics of both members and non-members of TASSP are included in Tables 1 to 6. They reveal several trends:

- Secondary school leaders are increasingly female and ethnic minorities. Newer members were more frequently female (41.1% vs. 19.1% for members of more than 10 years) and more often a member of an ethnic minority (20.1% vs. 15.2% for more than 10 years of membership).
- Just over 40 percent of newly hired principals and assistant principals are female (40.7%), almost double the rate among most experienced members.

- An increasing number of secondary school leaders are Hispanic (12.1% for recent hires, 8.5% for more experienced).
- Members come primarily from suburban and rural areas (80.4%).
- Nearly all members work in public schools (98.9%).
- Over one quarter of members (25.6%) work in schools of more than 1500 students; 37.5 percent in schools of more than 1000.
- Rural members are more likely to be less experienced (fewer years as a principal or assistant principal); urban members are more likely to be experienced.
- Over half of assistant principals are female (51.6%) which will contribute to greater numbers of females in the principalship in coming years.
- Most females (74.1 %) have less than ten years experience as a principal or assistant principal; nearly half of men (40.8%) have more than 10 years of experience.
- Nearly one quarter of Hispanic members (23.9%) have less than three years experience as a principal or assistant principal.

These trends, along with the increasing demand for school leaders, reflect the changing demographics of Texas secondary school leaders. Secondary school leaders are experienced (36.3% with more than 10 years of experience), and approaching retirement (59.7% of those are age 50 or higher). As vacancies are created it is likely that principals and assistant principals whose demographics vary from current members will fill them. These changes may require a different response from their professional association. The Association should anticipate these changes and plan to respond to them in a positive and proactive way. The trends are summarized in Table 7.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Members and Non-Members Responding to Survey

	Percentage	
Characteristic	Member	Non-Member
Current Role:		
Building Principal	51.1	52.1
Assistant Principal	44.1	46.1
Central Office	3.1	0.0
Other	1.7	1.8
Years in Current Position:		
<3	46.9	47.3
4-10	39.8	41.3
>10	13.4	11.4
Years as Principal or Assistant Principal:		
<1	5.9	1.8
2-3	15.8	12.6
4-6	21.1	27.5
7-10	20.9	27.5
11-15	18.2	22.8
>15	18.1	7.8
Age		
<30	2.3	1.8
31- 41	19.3	19.8
41-50	44.9	44.3
51-60	30.9	34.1
>60	2.6	0.0
Gender		
Male	69.6	68.9
Female	30.4	31.1
Ethnicity		
African American	5.2	10.2
Asian	0.1	0.0
Caucasian	82.6	60.8
Hispanic	10.5	25.9
Native American	1.0	1.2
Other	0.6	1.8

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Members by Years of Experience

	Years of Experience					
Characteristic	1	2-3	4-6	7-10	11-15	> 15
Current Role:						
Building Principal	17.6	23.3	46.6	62.2	65.0	66.4
Assistant Principal	81.3	74.7	51.6	31.9	28.9	26.6
Other	1.1	2.0	1.8	5.9	6.1	7.0
Years in Current Position:						
<3	98.9	98.8	39.8	40.4	30.0	17.3
4-10	1.1	1.2	59.3	58.8	47.2	33.9
>10	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.9	22.9	48.8
Age						
<30	16.3	6.9	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
31- 41	40.2	37.1	30.1	19.0	4.6	0.0
41-50	30.4	44.0	48.3	54.4	50.9	29.4
51-60	13.0	12.1	18.8	25.7	41.4	62.4
>60	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.9	3.2	8.2
Gender						
Male	59.3	61.8	67.2	67.2	76.0	81.2
Female	40.7	38.2	32.8	32.8	24.0	18.8
Ethnicity						
African American	1.1	5.7	7.0	6.1	3.5	5.0
Asian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0
Caucasian	84.6	82.1	81.4	79.4	86.3	83.7
Hispanic	12.1	11.4	10.4	12.6	8.8	8.5
Native American	0.0	0.8	0.9	1.5	1.1	1.1
Other	2.2	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	1.8
Ethnicity						
Majority	84.6	82.1	81.4	79.4	86.3	83.7
Minority	15.4	17.9	18.6	20.6	13.7	16.3

Reported in percentages

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Members
By Gender

	Percentage	
Characteristic	Female	Male
Current Role:		
Building Principal	41.8	55.6
Assistant Principal	51.6	40.6
Other	2.3	3.8
Years in Current Position:		
<3	52.9	44.1
4-10	38.6	40.3
>10	8.4	15.6
Years as Principal or Assistant Principal:		
<1	7.9	5.0
2-3	20.2	14.0
4-6	23.0	20.1
7-10	23.0	20.1
11-15	14.6	19.8
>15	11.4	21.0
Age		
<30	2.3	2.3
31- 41	17.0	20.1
41-50	49.4	43.1
51-60	27.7	32.2
>60	3.6	2.2
Ethnicity		
African American	7.0	4.4
Asian	0.0	0.1
Caucasian	81.6	83.3
Hispanic	10.5	10.3
Native American	0.6	1.2
Other	0.2	0.7

Table 4

Demographic Profile of Members
By Ethnicity

Characteristic	Percentage		
	African American	Caucasian	Hispanic
Current Role:			
Building Principal	32.1	53.3	44.2
Assistant Principal	61.5	42.1	52.1
Other	6.4	4.6	3.7
Years in Current Position:			
<3	33.3	47.6	46.7
4-10	49.4	39.2	39.4
>10	17.3	13.2	13.9
Years as Principal or Assistant Principal:			
<1	1.2	6.0	6.7
2-3	17.1	15.7	17.2
4-6	28.0	20.8	20.9
7-10	24.4	20.1	25.2
11-15	12.2	19.1	15.3
>15	17.1	18.4	14.7
Age			
<30	1.2	2.4	3.0
31- 41	18.3	19.2	22.6
41-50	47.6	44.3	50.0
51-60	26.8	31.7	23.8
>60	6.1	2.4	0.6
Gender			
Male	59.3	70.1	69.1
Female	40.7	29.9	30.9

Table 5

Demographic Profile of Members by Setting

Characteristic	Percentage		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Current Role:			
Building Principal	42.5	36.5	67.2
Assistant Principal	51.4	58.2	30.0
Other	6.1	5.3	2.9
Years in Current Position:			
<3	37.8	46.1	50.9
4-10	43.1	40.5	37.9
>10	19.1	13.4	11.3
Years as Principal or Assistant Principal:			
<1	2.0	6.1	7.2
2-3	13.4	14.7	17.1
4-6	18.7	20.6	22.3
7-10	17.7	20.4	22.6
11-15	22.7	18.2	16.6
>15	25.4	19.9	14.2
Age			
<30	1.3	2.6	2.7
31- 41	11.6	20.5	20.4
41-50	42.7	43.3	47.6
51-60	41.4	30.5	27.5
>60	3.0	3.1	1.9
Gender			
Male	61.1	64.6	78.1
Female	38.9	35.4	21.9
Ethnicity			
African American	9.2	6.5	2.1
Asian	0.3	0.0	0.0
Caucasian	69.6	84.7	87.4
Hispanic	19.1	6.9	9.0
Native American	0.3	1.1	1.3
Other	1.3	0.7	0.1

Table 6

Work Setting of Members and
Non-Members Responding to Survey

	Percentage	
Characteristic	Member	Non-Member
School Level		
Middle School / Jr. High	33.3	40.7
Middle/High School Comb	7.5	7.8
Elementary / MS Comb	1.0	0.6
High School	52.5	47.3
Other	5.8	3.6
School Setting		
Urban	19.7	30.4
Suburban	35.0	29.8
Rural	45.4	39.8
School's Status		
Public	98.9	98.8
Private, religious	0.8	1.2
Private, non-religious	0.1	0.0
Charter	0.2	0.0
School's Enrollment		
< 250	14.9	16.2
251 - 500	18.4	15.0
501 - 750	14.6	18.0
751 - 1000	14.6	16.8
1001 - 1500	11.9	10.8
> 1500	25.6	23.4

Table 7

Demographic Changes Among
Secondary School Principals in Texas

Years of Membership	
1 - 2 years	More than 10 years
female (41.1%)	male (80.9%)
ethnic minority (20.1%)	Caucasian (84.8%)
younger than 40 (44.0%)	older than 50 (59.7%)

Access to Information Drives Association Membership

The study also examined the reasons that secondary school leaders join a professional association. Respondents were asked to rate the items on a scale from 1 to 4 with 4 being of "greatest importance.

The data identified two primary reasons for membership---access to information and training, and availability of services that support the work of the principal. A detailed list of the reasons for membership is highlighted in Table 8. It reflects several important characteristics.

- Access to information was the most important reason for membership. This included keeping up-to-date on issues of importance, access to professional development, and receipt of publications. This area was rated much higher than all other areas.
- Also an important factor in membership decisions was availability of services. Most important were liability insurance and legal advice. Less important were other member services.
- Least important motivators for membership were access to Student Council, National (Junior) Honor Society, and Texas Association for Future Educators.

Respondents were also asked to identify the areas of responsibility that were of greatest importance to their work. Thirty-seven items were listed and respondents were asked to rate each as to need, with four being "high need" and one being "no need." From this list respondents were asked to prioritize the five most urgent needs.

In order to examine the implications of the data they were disaggregated based on gender, setting (urban, suburban, and rural), years of experience, and level (middle school, high school). There were few differences among the groups and clear trends were evident from the ratings and rankings provided

Table 8

Reasons for Joining Professional Associations
By Member and Non-Member

Reason for Joining	Rank		Rating	
	TASSP Members	Non Members	TASSP Members	Non Members
Keep up to date on issues of importance to principals	1	1	3.71	3.73
Receive liability insurance	2	3	3.50	3.28
Professional development to improve skills	3	2	3.39	3.47
Take advantage of member services (e.g., legal, student activities, conferences)	4	5	3.18	3.19
Receive association publications	5	7	3.10	3.12
Network with others who share similar interests and concerns	6	4	3.07	3.22
Access legal assistance	7	6	3.06	3.16
Be active in advocating for school reform	8	8	2.71	2.88
Influence education issues with government	9	9	2.70	2.82
Job opportunities	10 T	10	2.48	2.55
Access Student Council	10 T	11	2.48	2.41
Access National (Junior) Honor Society	12	13	2.41	2.33
Receive discounts on conferences, workshops, publications	13	12	2.23	2.34
Access Texas Association for Future Educators (TAFE)	14	14	2.16	2.20

Table 9

Urgent Needs of Secondary School Leaders
Member - Non-Member and By Gender

	Members	Non Members	Female	Male
Providing instructional leadership	1	2	1	1
Promoting high levels of student achievement	2	1	2	2
Leading innovation and change	3	3	3	3
Infusing technology in schools	4	6	7	4
Providing safe/orderly environment for learning	5	4	6	5
Renewing and invigorating veteran staff	6	7	4	8
Creating a productive school climate	7	5	5	7
Developing and implementing effective discipline practices	8	8	10	6
Facilitating curriculum planning and development	9	9	8	12
Working special needs populations	10	10	9	9

by respondents. Table 9 presents a consolidated list disaggregated by membership and by gender.

Several trends emerged from the data. They reflect an emphasis on instructional leadership and improving both teaching and learning.

Providing instructional leadership and promoting high levels of student achievement, and leading innovation and change emerged as the most frequently cited needs. Not only were they ranked at the top of the list but their ratings were significantly higher than other topics.

Other areas of responsibility that were highly rated included infusion of technology, providing a safe and orderly learning environment, and renewing and invigorating veteran staff. While highly ranked, they were not as highly rated as the earlier items.

While there were some minor differences among groups, providing instructional leadership and promoting high levels of achievement were always rated the top two items with the exception of suburban schools. This may reflect the demographics of the constituent schools and the achievement level of the student they serve.

Focus group meetings revealed high levels of satisfaction with most information provided by the Association. Every group, however, expressed concern for the need for continuing information and support around these urgent needs. Participants shared a perceived vulnerability to being "out of the loop" on current trends and changing state and national standards.

Prospects for Continued Membership

While all member categories reported a high probability of continued membership there were some slight differences when the data were disaggregated:

- New members were more uncertain about continued membership;
- There was greater uncertainty about continued membership among middle school leaders and those in urban settings;
- Uncertainty about continued membership declined precipitously in urban settings after six years of experience;
- Uncertainty about continued membership increased significantly in rural areas with years of experience; a similar increase was present among suburban members;

The data about prospects for continued membership is contained in Tables 6 to 10. It demonstrates a high probability for continued membership but identified some areas of vulnerability---middle school and urban settings. TASSP has strong ties to high schools and high school members are most visible in leadership positions. Texas, as many of states, has a viable middle school association that offers services, information and professional development, targeted at the middle level. Similarly, many large urban districts, because of their size, are able to provide services---access to information and training, than suburban and rural districts many not be able to offer. Therefore, membership in the Association may not provide the same value for secondary school leaders in urban settings.

Table 10

Probability of Continued Membership
By Years of Experience

	Percentage			
	Years of Experience			All Members
	1-3	4-10	11+	
Certainly will	71.2	80.0	80.4	78.1
Probably will	27.9	18.3	17.1	20.0
Unsure	0.9	1.4	1.4	1.3
Probably will not	0.0	0.3	0 7	0.4
Certainly will not	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1

Table 11

Probability of Continued Membership
By Setting and Level

	Percentage				
	Setting			Level	
	Urban	Sub	Rural	MS	HS
Certainly will	75.3	78.9	79.4	75.1	82.4
Probably will	22.7	20.0	18.5	23.0	16.4
Unsure	1.0	0.6	1.9	1.4	0.9
Probably will not	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.3
Certainly will not	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1

Table 12

Uncertainty About Membership

		Years of Experience		
		1-3	4-10	11+
Uncertain about rejoining	All members	0.9 %	1.7 %	2.5%

Uncertainty factor = Sum of Unsure, Probably will not, Certainly will not

Table 13

Uncertainty About Membership
By Level and Setting

Percent Uncertain About Rejoining					
All Members	Middle School	High School	Urban	Suburban	Rural
1.8	2.0	1.3	2.0	1.2	2.2

Table 14

Uncertainty About Membership
By Years of Experience

	Uncertainty Years of Experience		
	1-3	4-10	11+
Middle School	0.8	1.4	2.5
High School	0.0	2.7	1.7

	Years of Experience					
	1	2-3	4-6	7-10	11-15	> 15
Urban	0.0	2.5	3.6	0.0	0.0	3.9
Suburban	0.0	0.0	0.9	1.8	2.1	0.9
Rural	0.0	0.8	1.9	1.9	4.3	5.0

Access to and Use of Technology

In order to understand the implications of changing needs for secondary school principals the study inquired about the access and use of various forms of technology. Specifically, data were collected about use of computers, e-mail and the Association's web site. The following describes the findings:

- Nearly all secondary school leaders reported access to a computer (99.1% members, 97.5% non-members); Most (83.3% members, 97.5% non-members) report access to the internet and to e-mail (86.4% members, 86.3 % non-members) as well as the TASSP web site (51.8% members, 43.7% non-members);
- Use of e-mail was reported by most members (96.3%) and non-members (97.0%); however, only 67.5% of members reported daily use;
- Use of e-mail was greater among females (73.7% daily use) and among younger members (75.0% daily use);
- E-mail was used less frequently by members over age 60 (51.5% daily use) and among those with more than 11 years of experience as a principal or assistant principal;
- Most members reported occasionally accessing TASSP's web site (78.5%);
- Female members and those with fewer years of experience reported the greatest use of the web site;
- Members aged 41-50 reported the most regular use; over half (54.3%) accessed the site at least weekly;

This study found that secondary school principals have almost universal access to a computer, one with internet and e-mail services. Respondents reported high levels of use for all forms of technology. Not surprisingly, younger

members reported greater use. Females reported higher levels of use than males.

This universal access and high levels of use presents both a challenge and an opportunity for TASSP and other professional organizations. They can capitalize on technology and use it as a vehicle to maintain communication with members and provide the information members report they want. Failure to respond leaves professional organizations vulnerable. Through the internet members have access to varied sources of information, often much of the same information they traditionally received from their association. Such easy access to new sources of information combined with the rapidly changing demands for up-to-date information may make association membership of less value.

Table 15

Access to Technology

	Percentage	
Item	Member	Non Member
Daily access to a computer	99.1	97.5
Currently access the internet	83.3	97.5
Access to e-mail	86.4	86.3
Access TASSP web site	51.8	43.7

Table 16

Use of E-Mail

By Membership and Gender

	Total responses	Member	Non Member	Male	Female
several times a day	23.4	22.5	31.9	21.4	25.4
daily	44.1	45.2	32.6	43.9	48.3
occasionally	28.9	28.6	32.6	30.3	24.6
never	3.6	3.7	3.0	4.4	1.7

By Age

		Age					
	Total responses	< 30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	>70
several times a day	23.4	34.4	27.0	23.0	19.4	8.6	100.0
daily	44.1	40.6	42.7	46.2	45.6	42.9	0.0
occasionally	28.9	25.0	27.3	27.2	30.8	40.0	0.0
never	3.6	0.0	3.0	3.5	4.1	8.6	0.0

By Years of Experience

		Years as Administrator					
	Total responses	1	2-3	4-6	7-10	11-15	>15
several times a day	23.4	19.0	22.7	27.6	23.5	19.6	19.8
daily	44.1	48.8	45.4	38.7	48.7	44.7	49.1
occasionally	28.9	28.6	28.0	29.0	24.9	32.2	27.5
never	3.6	3.6	3.9	4.7	2.9	3.5	3.6

Themes

Although the data revealed useful information, some of the most important findings become evident only when trends were aggregated across data sets (both surveys, focus group sessions).

Quality and Value

Throughout the data, the themes of quality and value emerged. In other words, what am I getting for my membership dollar? With a larger percentage of members being required to pay for their own membership, or forced to choose a single paid professional membership, each year brings renewed scrutiny of the Association's publications, services and conferences.

Membership decisions are a product of the extent of social bonding that occurs between an individual and a group. This kind of bonding has four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989). Attachment is the most ephemeral of these elements and deals with the familiarity and attractiveness of the group. We tend to join groups made up of people like us. Such groups tend to share certain emotional and social commitments that make us comfortable...which engage us. Among principals, many of whom see themselves as isolated in their work setting, TASSP has long provided that sense of belonging. Indeed, many people reported that they belong to TASSP because it is simply part of the role. It's what a principal does. Increasingly, though, this reason is less significant as members are forced to make choices about where they will put their own membership dollars.

Commitment is the rational side of attachment, an assessment of "what's in it for me?" It is the payoff for membership...the "hard" reasons. Both the survey data and interviews reveal the hard reasons can be measured in services. Among members and non-members, access to information receives the highest

rating as a determinant of membership. Included in this category is the amount of complimentary material that accompanies membership in the organization. During focus interviews, a number of respondents commented on the "junk mail" syndrome that is increasing in some associations. One said "I can count on TASSP materials containing something of professional value." Under the category of commitment, it is also important to examine the importance of other services and products as well. Which are seen as "hard" indicators of value for membership dollars?

Involvement is the amount and nature of participation someone has with other group members. For TASSP, this is measured in two areas: conferences and governance activity. Those who attend TASSP conferences tend to rate them quite highly, and are likely to want to return. However, among the newest members, conference attendance is quite low (less than 10% attend a conference in their first three years as a principal); thus, they do not experience that satisfaction which is a membership enticement for long-term members.

Similar circumstances exist in discussions of governance. As in most organizations, one becomes involved in its governance through long affiliation. Therefore, newer principals are generally not included in the governance activities of the group. Unfortunately, it is precisely this group, principals with less than three years of service, who are least committed to renewing their membership. Therefore, the weakest element of the membership base is found among those people upon whom the successful future of the organization depends.

Belief is simply the perception that "this group is good for people like me." In order to formulate that belief, one must either have empirical evidence that membership is good for me (e.g., the material helps me do my job better) or see that other people like me are in leadership positions in the organization. This latter factor is particularly significant in the recruitment of new principals who are demographically quite different from the established membership: women, and minorities.

In summary, TASSP enjoys a very strong commitment to the organization, but these are based largely on ephemeral reasons: principals belong, there is a long history of membership, and the organization is "approachable" and is populated with friendly people. Unfortunately, these reasons are strongest among older members---those most likely to renew membership anyway. They are weakest among the newer members, specifically those who have been in their roles for less than three years.

A major commitment must be made to encourage newer members to see the "hard" value of membership, so that they will slowly develop the "softer" commitments that tend to sustain membership in the organization.

Changing Membership

The demographics of the principalship are changing quite dramatically. A new wave of members hold very different views of the principalship and, therefore, may assess the value of membership in ways that vary from members with more years of experience. Specifically,

- They actively reject the old managerial role of the principalship and focus on instructional leadership.
- They reject old style professional organizations (including hierarchical governance, reward for longevity, etc.) They seek participation.
- They value information that helps move them from manager to instructional leader. They value information about how to do things rather than motivational admonitions that they should. They seek training and continuing education.

Due to these changes the individuals most influential in making the decisions about the organization's direction and future may not be clearly synchronized with the newer principal, the one whose continued membership is essential. While the study found few differences regarding areas of responsibility or current needs among newer and more experienced members, it did identify a slighter degree of uncertainty about membership among newer members.

Contemporary school leaders, especially those comfortable with the use of technology, have access to information and data from many sources. The traditional reliance on a professional organization for such information can be easily replaced through the use of the internet and other electronic sources. Indeed, many professional journals are now available on-line thus reducing the need for membership.

TASSP, and professional associations in general, will need to stay current with these changing trends. It will be important to identify ways in which newer members can become more actively involved in the Association's governance and decision-making structure. Their participation in identifying priorities and needs for new members will strengthen their prospects for continued membership and make the Association increasingly attractive to new secondary school leaders.

Publications, Conference and Workshops

The needs of members and non-members alike are specific and diverse. People seek specific information about a specific topic of concern to them and their school. This might include leading curriculum reform, promoting achievement for all students, working with special needs populations, or the infusion of technology. Despite the exact nature of their question, it is important to understand that no other topic, no matter how engaging, will satisfy them. This was evidenced by the strength of concern expressed by middle school leaders during focus group sessions. They perceive that the conferences and workshops are structured to address needs of high school members and desire additional opportunities to deal with topics relevant to middle schools.

The data indicates that a "curriculum" for each workshop or conference should be developed well in advance of its first publicity. A focus group (or groups) at each activity could be used to help plan the next one, so that specific topics and issues could be announced, perhaps even before participants leave the current session. Without advance notice of content, it is difficult for people to

plan their attendance. Because of fiscal constraints, focus group participants indicated that the decision to attend a particular conference or workshop focuses on the content. In order to attract attendance, the substance of the conference must be known early.

Conference schedules should be data-driven, that is, responding to specific issues, questions and needs identified in this study as well as an on-going assessment conducted at conferences, workshops and institutes. These assessments should be supplemented with focus groups that are created for the specific purpose of helping to plan the Association's professional development activities. Using only in-house groups, or the standing governance groups, assures that the program will reflect "the way we do things around here," rather than significant attention to member needs. This will be particularly important in response to the changing demographics of secondary school leaders and the changing demands placed on contemporary school leaders.

Membership Maintenance

In examining why individuals join a professional association, it is clear that they expect service without (much) extra cost. Information in the form of publications and other data sources is highly valued. Professional liability insurance, long a mainstay reason for professional membership, is still rated highly. The same is true for other access services---those which are available through TASSP but at an extra cost (conferences, workshops).

Examining loyalty, commitment to renewal softens in the second and third year of membership. During the first year, membership is viewed as a gift---a thing of value. The second year, because "I'm a principal," membership seems to be essential. It is the third year that people begin to ask if they are getting their money's worth. Ironically, it is after the third year that people begin to participate more fully in the organization. It seems, then, that something which entices the second year of membership, and some kind of overture toward

involvement in the organization in the third year, is likely to build the kind of loyalty from which TASSP has long benefited.

Further, after the third year, TASSP members tend to become very loyal. They turn first to TASSP for services, their ratings of association services rise, and they are more likely to attend conferences and institutes. Therefore, the cultivation of loyal members is likely to maintain membership.

Finally, membership among Assistant Principals is quite low. Only about 40% of the respondents were assistants. Assuming that there are nearly as many (perhaps more) assistant principals as principals in Texas schools, this is a market that seems especially important to cultivate.

Summary

This study examined the findings of a comprehensive assessment of the demographics and needs of secondary school leaders in Texas. It reported on how members and non-members viewed the programs, products and services of the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals.

While the data indicated solid support for the Association, it also indicated room for growth and improvement, enhancing the Association's already strong services to school leaders. This study provided useful information about ways to organize, structure, and position TASSP so that it continued to be viewed as "quality" by secondary school leaders in Texas.

The study, while centered on secondary school leaders in Texas, offers insights into changing needs and interests of members of similar professional organizations. It demonstrates that changing demographics and altered expectations for school leaders, may require that professional organizations examine their services to members, to assure that the services meet the specific interests of members, and meet the members perceptions of value.

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